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DAWN

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Parties' apathy to local govt weakens democracy: Kh Asif

• Defence minister says military rulers stayed longer in power due to introduction of local bodies • Notes resistance to empowering grassroots tier comes from bureaucracy • LUMS VC highlights administrative, service delivery dimensions of local govt

By Ahmad Fraz Khan

LAHORE: Despite their crucial role in strengthening grassroots politics and democratic governance, local governments in Pakistan continue to remain neglected by political parties — a failure that has ultimately weakened civilian rule, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said here on Saturday.

Addressing a session titled 'Devolution for Revolution' at ThinkFest, the federal minister said that three military rulers — Gen Ayub Khan, Gen Ziaul Haq and Gen Pervez Musharraf — remained in power longer than any civilian government largely because they introduced local government systems and drew political strength from them.

Flanked by Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) Vice Chancellor Dr Ali Cheema, former State Bank governor Dr Ishrat Hussain and former minority MPA Mary James Gill, he admitted that the failure to institutionalise local bodies was "a political failure on our part".

He noted that local government elections, whenever held, had historically been far less controversial than national polls. "Yet we have continued to avoid them," he regretted.

The minister recalled that local bodies were included in the Charter of Democracy signed by the two major political parties, his own PML-N and the PPP, but the provision failed to find adequate space in the 18th Constitutional Amendment, even though most other agreed reforms were incorporated.

He added that resistance to empowering the grassroots tier mainly came from the bureaucracy, which feared losing authority to elected representatives.

Delivery system

Expanding the discussion, Ali Cheema of LUMS highlighted the administrative and service delivery dimensions of local governments. While Mr Asif focused on their political and democratic value, Mr Cheema said their real strength resided in defining the state's service delivery system.

Citing international examples, he said the United Kingdom spent nearly 60 per cent of its development funds through local governments, while the United States allocated around 40pc. "This is how they achieved the so-called municipal revolution," he said.

He explained that in developed countries, local governments provided essential services such as clean water, sanitation, health facilities and civic infrastructure, while also collecting taxes and strengthening citizens' sense of ownership.

"In Pakistan, unfortunately, this institutional infrastructure was never built. When the system is missing, the sense of citizenship also remains weak," he added.

Fiscal reforms

The discussion then shifted to constitutional and fiscal reforms, with Dr Ishrat Hussain pointing out that although the 18th Amendment clearly defined the roles of federal and provincial governments, it failed to properly outline the functions and powers of the third tier of governance.

"This ambiguity continues to create political and administrative friction," he said, adding that the amendment should have established a provincial finance commission to directly channel funds to underdeveloped areas within provinces.

Strong local governments, he argued, would not only improve development efficiency but could also generate their own revenue by improving tax collection and identifying new income sources. He pointed out that if institutions such as the Lahore Development Authority, the Water and Sanitation Agency and other civic bodies were placed under the authority of an elected mayor, municipal administrations would become financially stronger and more self-sustaining.

Advising political parties to embrace rather than compete with local governments, Dr Hussain said empowering the grassroots tier would ultimately strengthen democratic governance and benefit mainstream politics.

Mary James Gill was of the opinion that local bodies gave identity and dignity to people at the grassroots level. Punjab lawmaker Ahmad Ihsan moderated the session.

Five killed in GB, Balochistan amid cold wave

Met office forecasts more rain, snow in parts of country

By Jamil Nagri and Saleem Shahid

LOCALS gather at the site after a watchtower on a house collapsed on Saturday due to recent heavy snowfall in Diamer, Gilgit-Baltistan.—Dawn

GILGIT/QUETTA: Four people were killed in Gilgit-Baltistan when a tower collapsed on a house following heavy snowfall in Diamer, while one person died in Balochistan after a roof caved in due to downpour in Zhob.

Police said a "clock/observation tower" near a residential home in Tangir Valley in Diamer collapsed on a house, resulting in the death of four members of a family and injuries to two other members.

Diamer Deputy Commissioner Ataur Rehman Kakar said heavy snowfall occurred in Tangir on Thursday, which might have caused the incident. According to police sources, the casualties could rise as the relief operation continued.

The Karakoram Highway (KKH), Baltistan Road, Ghizer–Shandur Road and other roads were opened to traffic on Saturday, while link roads in various areas of the region, including Astore, Skardu, Ghanche, Ghizer and Shigar, remained blocked.

Due to the cold weather, people in Gilgit-Baltistan continued to face difficulties, which were compounded by road closures and electricity shortages. The GB government issued a travel advisory for tourists, stating that heavy snowfall had been recorded in Hunza, Nagar, Ghizer, Astore, Skardu, Shigar, Ghanche, Kharmang and Diamer.

The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), meanwhile, predicted more rain and snowfall in various parts of the country till Tuesday. The advisory said that due to continuous snowfall, there was a risk that some roads in the upper and mountainous areas would be partially or completely closed. It asked tourists and residents to take precautions.

Zhob roof collapse

In Zhob, a child was killed and two sustained injuries in a roof-collapse incident, while more than six people were admitted to hospitals after accidents caused by slippery road conditions following snowfall.

In Quetta, the cold wave continued as Siberian winds lashed the provincial capital and other parts of northern and central Balochistan for the third day.

The sky was clear on Saturday, but the weather remained extremely cold amid low gas pressure, adding to people's hardships. Business centres and roads in Quetta presented a deserted look as businesspeople and consumers preferred to stay indoors. Traffic was also thin.

LPG dealers, meanwhile, increased cylinder prices due to an increase in demand.

In order to provide relief, the Quetta Electric Supply Company (Qesco) announced the suspension of load-shedding in Quetta and the surrounding areas of the provincial capital for one week due to the severe cold weather, but people were not getting power supply in other cities of the province.

Due to the intense cold, water in pipelines froze in Quetta, Kalat, Chaman and Ziarat, leading to a shortage of drinking water in several areas. However, highways and interprovincial roads that were blocked due to snow were opened by the local administration, but authorities asked people to check weather updates before travelling.

In many parts of the province, life had come to a standstill, particularly in Chaman, Qila Abdullah, Ziarat, Pishin, Toba Achakzai and other areas, as temperatures in the upper and Pak-Afghan border regions dropped to as low as minus 12 degrees Celsius.The Met Office predicted that in the next 24 hours, more light and heavy rain was expected with icy winds in various districts, including Quetta, Kalat, Khuzdar, Chaman, Qila Abdullah, Qila Saifullah, Zhob, Pishin, Naushki, Kharan, Sibi, Nasirabad, Kachhi, Washuk, Dalbandin and the coastal areas of Makran, while Kan Mehtarzai, Muslim Bagh, Pishin, Toba Kakari, Toba Achakzai and Kalat could receive snowfall.

Displaced by security operation, caught in snowstorm, over 1,500 rescued in Tirah

• 100 people received medical assistance; 350 vehicles shifted to safe zones • Operations continue for over 36 hours despite sub-zero temperatures • Murree Expressway reopens to limited traffic; NHMP urges citizens to check helpline 130 before attempting travel

By Manzoor Ali

PESHAWAR: Heavy snowfall and a snowstorm left thousands stranded in the Tirah valley of Khyber district, where authorities said over 15,000 people had been rescued, as evacuation operations continued on Saturday for residents fleeing their homes amid fears of a renewed military operation.

KP's Rescue 1122 spokesperson Bilal Ahmed Faizi said in a statement that the rescue operations were ongoing for those trapped in the valley.

"Rescue 1122 has so far rescued more than 1,500 people and 350 vehicles and shifted them to safe places during the rescue operation, while more than 100 people have also been provided medical assistance," he said.

The spokesperson added that over 100 personnel and officers from Khyber, Peshawar, Mardan, Nowshera and Swabi's Rescue 1122 divisions were participating in the operation.

In a later statement, Faizi said that the rescue operation had been ongoing for more than 36 hours.

"Despite the severe cold, subzero temperatures and difficult routes, rescue personnel are in the field and are carrying out rescue activities without interruption," he said.

The Khyber district administration on Thursday suspended the evacuation of more families from Tirah Valley in view of the heavy snowfall, asking them to refrain from travelling to Bara until Friday evening due to the inclement weather.

Citizens advised to avoid travel

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) said that the Murree Expressway had been opened to limited traffic due to an improvement in the weather conditions.

"However, due to the changing weather conditions and increasing rush, there is a possibility of closing the Murree Expressway," the spokesperson added, requesting the public to avoid unnecessary travel.

The spokesperson said that the motorway police had performed their duties with diligence during the heavy snowfall and that traffic was controlled via the "best strategy according to the situation", adding that the relevant officers themselves were in the field taking the lead.

According to the motorways spokesperson, more rain and snowfall is predicted in Murree and Galiyat on Monday and Tuesday.

NHMP's media department requested that tourists cooperate with the Motorway Police, who would be on alert 24 hours a day to prevent any sudden disaster.

"The Motorway Police will be present to guide and protect tourists," it said.

It advised citizens to contact its helpline at 130 in case of emergency and obtain guidance from the Motorway Police's social media accounts before starting the journey.

Three charged in UK over in attacks on Imran's aide, supports case

By Our Correspondent

LONDON: British counter-terrorism police have charged three men in connection with a series of "highly targeted" attacks against Pakistani dissidents living in the United Kingdom, including a former minister in the Imran Khan government.

The alleged assaults took place in Cambridgeshire and Buckinghamshire between Dec 24 and 31 and were directed at two prominent supporters of the jailed former Pakistani prime minister. Counter-terrorism police took over the investigation from local forces, citing the deliberate and targeted nature of the incidents.

One of the victims, Mirza Shahzad Akbar, a former accountability adviser in Mr Khan's cabinet, said he was brutally assaulted at his home after an attacker confirmed his identity. He told British media that he had been punched repeatedly and is now in hiding, fearing for his and his family's safety.

On Friday, police confirmed that three British nationals had been charged. Karl Blackbird, 40, and Clark McAulay, 39, face charges of conspiracy to cause actual bodily harm in relation to separate incidents. A third man, Doneto Brammer, 21, has been charged in connection with the attack on Akbar's home and faces additional charges, including possession of a prohibited weapon and conspiracy to commit arson.

All three appeared before Westminster Magistrates' Court on Saturday.

Several other suspects have been arrested during coordinated raids across London, the Midlands and Essex and later released on bail. Police said the investigation remains ongoing and that detectives are keeping an open mind regarding motive and possible links between the attacks.

Pakistan, US to jointly act against fraudulent visa networks

Natalie Baker calls on interior minister

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the United States on Saturday decided to take joint action against fraudulent visa networks under comprehensive standard operating procedures (SOPs).

The decision came during a meeting between Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and US Charge de' Affaires Natalie Baker here.

A detailed discussion was held on Pakistan–US relations and increasing cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

Talks were also held on preventing illegal immigration and the effectiveness of the pre-immigration clearance system.

Both sides agreed to enhance cooperation between law enforcement agencies, with a particular focus on police training.

Speaking during the meeting, Mr Naqvi said a zero-tolerance policy had been adopted against the "agent mafia", and welcomed cooperation with Washington in this sector.

"I am personally supervising action against fraudulent visa networks," he said. He further explained that security features had been added to passports using modern technology, making the travel document "foolproof".

The interior minister noted that illegal immigration had become a serious issue and acknowledged Washington's full-scale crackdown against those who entered the US illegally.

"Due to the government's effective measures, illegal immigration has decreased by 47 per cent," Mr Naqvi said.

"Those involved in fraudulent documentation networks don't deserve any leniency."

Meanwhile, Ms Baker said the US attached "special importance" to its relationship with Pakistan. "Our priorities are aligned, and the promotion of mutual cooperation will further strengthen bilateral relations," she added.

Mr Naqvi and Ms Baker had also recently agreed to enhance collaboration in bilateral security and border management.

Courts should not convert divorce cases into 'khula': SC

Apex court says granting *khula* without petitioner seeking it legally unsustainable

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court has ruled that the family courts must not, on their own motion, convert a wife's demand for divorce into 'khula' proceedings, as doing so would deprive her of her right to dower.

Consequently, the apex court overturned the decisions of the lower forum and dissolved a marriage on the grounds of "talaq" (divorce) instead of khula, since the husband had contracted a second marriage. The Supreme Court also ordered awarding the wife her full unpaid dower of Rs1.2 million through the executing family court.

"We have noted that where a wife expresses aversion, the family court dissolves the marriage on the grounds of khula and the wife is deprived of her dower," observed Justice Musarrat Hilali in a five-page judgment on Friday.

Headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi, the two-judge Supreme Court bench had taken up an appeal by Naila Javed against the June 30, 2025 Peshawar High Court (PHC) Abbottabad Bench's maintaining of the dissolution of her marriage by the family court on the basis of khula, with a decree to forego her remaining dower as a condition of khula.

The Supreme Court emphasised that if the aversion was the outcome of some reasons, then dissolution should be based on those particular reasons. The courts should not, on their own motion and without the statement of the wife, convert the demand for divorce into khula.

Through her petition, Ms Javed contended that she never sought khula and that her case was rather based on the grounds pleaded under the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939 (DMMA). And, more importantly, her husband had contracted a second marriage without complying with the mandatory procedure under Section 6 of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961 (MFLO). Thus, she was entitled to dissolution of marriage under Section 2(iiia) of the DMMA with full retention of her dower.

The judgement noted that the marital union was solemnised between the parties on Dec 16, 2013, but irreconcilable differences arose between them. Upon the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage, the petitioner instituted a suit before the family court seeking a decree of dissolution of marriage on the grounds of cruelty, non-payment of the remaining dower, non-payment of maintenance, and that the respondent had contracted a second marriage during the pendency of the case without her permission.

The family court, however, did not rule on the merits of these pleaded grounds; instead, it concluded that the petitioner had failed to substantiate the allegations of cruelty and had expressed an unequivocal unwillingness to live with the respondent, the judgement observed.

Subsequently, the family court granted a decree of dissolution of marriage by way of khula, with a direction to the wife to relinquish her claim of outstanding dower.

During the hearing, the Supreme Court formulated a number of questions for consideration, namely whether the petitioner had discharged the burden of proof to establish her claim of cruelty, whether the court could exercise suo motu powers to convert the plaintiff's claim for divorce into khula, and whether a wife's averment of irreconcilable aversion towards her husband constituted a legally sufficient ground to initiate khula proceedings and relinquish dower.

The judgement said the petitioner did not plead for dissolution of marriage in her original suit. However, during the pendency of the suit, when the respondent contracted a second marriage without her permission, she sought dissolution of marriage.

Referring to the second marriage, the Supreme Court said Section 2(iiia) of the DMMA expressly provides that a woman is entitled to dissolution of marriage if the husband has contracted a second marriage in contravention of the MFLO.

Under Section 6 of the MFLO, contracting a second marriage without the written permission of the arbitration council constitutes a contravention, attracting both penal and civil consequences, including dissolution, the judgement noted.

In the present case, the respondent neither obtained the permission of the existing wife nor sought a declaration from the arbitration council. There is thus no dispute that the second marriage was contracted without obtaining the written permission of the council. This conclusively establishes a violation of the statutory ground under Section 2(iiia) of the DMMA, the judgement said.

The family court and the appellate court failed to adjudicate this ground despite its clear availability on the record, the judgement noted, adding that a lower court cannot convert a suit under the DMMA into one for khula in the absence of a clear and unequivocal statement by the wife.Thus, the concurrent judgements of the courts below granting khula without the petitioner seeking it are legally unsustainable, the Supreme Court held.